



AI-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. This paper synthesizes the empirical and theoretical literature [2008–2024] on artificial intelligence (AI) integration in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, with the aim of clarifying both its pedagogical opportunities and its practical challenges. A narrative literature review approach was used, drawing on peer-reviewed studies published in journals such as *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *System*, *Assessing Writing*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*, supplemented by foundational works on computer- and mobile-assisted language learning. The reviewed literature indicates that AI tools — including generative chatbots, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated feedback engines — can enhance individualized instruction, provide immediate corrective feedback, and increase learners' willingness to communicate [Barrot, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024; Song, 2023]. At the same time, the literature documents recurring concerns about overreliance on AI, diminished learner autonomy, inconsistent feedback accuracy, academic-integrity risks, and unequal access across institutions [Dai & Liu, 2024; Sumakul, Hamied, & Sukyadi, 2022]. The paper concludes that AI functions most effectively as a mediating tool operating alongside, rather than instead of, the teacher, and it proposes practical directions for the responsible integration of AI in EFL classrooms.

Keywords. Artificial intelligence (AI); English as a Foreign Language (EFL); computer-assisted language learning (CALL); ChatGPT; chatbots; adaptive feedback; learner autonomy; mobile-assisted language learning (MALL); second language writing; teacher mediation.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from an experimental technology to a routine feature of language classrooms worldwide. Tools such as ChatGPT, Duolingo, Grammarly, and various intelligent tutoring systems now sit alongside textbooks and teachers as sources of linguistic input, feedback, and practice opportunities for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners [Dai & Liu, 2024; Jiang, 2022]. This shift did not occur overnight. It builds on decades of research into computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and, later, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which established that technology could support — though not replace — the social and communicative dimensions of language acquisition [Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018].

Early CALL research treated the computer chiefly as a delivery mechanism for drills and language content [Warschauer & Healey, 1998]. The advent of mobile devices shifted



attention toward learner mobility, situated practice, and collaboration, as captured in Kukulska-Hulme and Shield's [2008] influential overview of MALL, which distinguished content-delivery approaches from those emphasizing supported interaction. A decade later, Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg [2018] documented a further shift toward collaborative, socially embedded mobile learning designs.

AI-ALL extends this trajectory by adding adaptivity: rather than delivering fixed content, AI systems can respond dynamically to a learner's input, adjusting difficulty, generating personalized exercises, and producing natural-language feedback in real time [Jiang, 2022]. This dynamic responsiveness invites interpretation through Vygotsky's [1978] sociocultural theory, in which learning is mediated by more capable others operating within a learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Opportunities of AI in EFL Classrooms:

1. Individualized and Adaptive Instruction. A recurring finding across the literature is that AI systems can tailor content and pacing to individual learners far more precisely than a single teacher addressing a full class. Jiang [2022], reviewing empirical studies of AI in EFL contexts, concluded that adaptive platforms allow learners to progress through material matched to their proficiency level, which supports more efficient skill development. Similarly, Sumakul, Hamied, and Sukyadi [2022] found that Indonesian EFL teachers viewed AI's capacity for personalization as one of its central pedagogical strengths, even as they voiced caution about its limitations.

2. Immediate, Detailed Feedback on Writing. Writing is the skill most thoroughly examined in AI-ALL research, largely because generative tools such as ChatGPT can produce feedback instantly, at any hour, without waiting for teacher availability. Barrot [2023] reviewed ChatGPT's potential for second-language writing and identified its ability to assist with idea generation, organization, and language-level revision. Song [2023] reported that ChatGPT-assisted feedback was associated with gains in EFL students' academic writing performance and motivation, while Guo and Wang [2024] found that ChatGPT could meaningfully support, though not fully replace, teacher feedback on EFL compositions.

3. Expanded Opportunities for Speaking Practice. Speaking practice is often constrained by large class sizes and limited class time. AI conversational agents address this constraint by offering learners low-stakes, always-available interlocutors. Fathi, Rahimi, and Derakhshan [2024] found that AI-mediated interactions improved EFL learners' speaking skills and their willingness to communicate, an affective variable strongly linked to long-term language development. Jeon [2024] similarly documented that young EFL learners perceived chatbot interaction as a comfortable, low-anxiety space for oral practice.

4. Access to Authentic Resources and Increased Engagement. Beyond specific skills, AI tools broaden learners' access to authentic, level-appropriate materials and interactive content, which several studies link to increased engagement [Dai & Liu, 2024; Jiang, 2022]. This aligns with the broader MALL literature's emphasis on situated, learner-driven access to language input outside the physical classroom [Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018].

Table 1. Opportunities and Challenges of AI in EFL Classrooms, by Dimension

Dimension	Opportunities	Challenges
Feedback & assessment	Instant, detailed corrective feedback on grammar, lexis, and structure [Barrot, 2023; Song, 2023; Guo & Wang, 2024]	Feedback can be inaccurate, generic, or decontextualized; risk of over-correction [Barrot, 2023]
Speaking & interaction	Low-anxiety practice partners; gains in willingness to communicate [Fathi, Rahimi, & Derakhshan, 2024; Jeon, 2024]	Limited pragmatic and cultural nuance; unnatural turn-taking in chatbot dialogue [Jeon, 2024]
Personalization	Adaptive pacing and content matched to proficiency level [Jiang, 2022; Sumakul, Hamied, & Sukyadi, 2022]	Algorithmic profiling may narrow input diversity; data-privacy concerns [Sumakul et al., 2022]
Learner autonomy	Anytime, anywhere access supports self-regulated, mobile learning [Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018]	Overreliance may weaken independent strategy use and critical thinking [Dai & Liu, 2024]
Academic integrity	Drafting and revision support that models good writing practice [Guo & Wang, 2024]	Risk of unattributed AI-generated text and assessment-validity concerns [Barrot, 2023]
Teacher role	Frees time for higher-order tasks; new professional opportunities [Dai & Liu, 2024]	Requires digital literacy and pedagogical training many teachers still lack [pre-service EFL teacher study, 2024]

Source: compiled by the author from the studies cited in Sections 3 and 4.

Challenges of AI in EFL Classrooms:

1. Overreliance and the Erosion of Learner Autonomy. Several studies caution that easy access to AI-generated answers and corrections may reduce learners' engagement in the effortful cognitive work that underlies durable language learning. Dai and Liu [2024], in a qualitative study of Chinese EFL students, found that while participants valued AI's convenience, they also recognized a risk of becoming dependent on it rather than developing independent problem-solving strategies.



2. Accuracy and Pedagogical Limitations of AI Feedback. AI-generated feedback is not infallible. Barrot [2023] noted that ChatGPT can produce inaccurate, overly generic, or context-insensitive responses, and that it lacks a teacher's ability to calibrate feedback to an individual learner's developmental stage. Guo and Wang [2024] likewise argued that ChatGPT feedback works best as a supplement that teachers curate, rather than as a stand-alone substitute for expert judgment.

3. Academic Integrity and Assessment Validity. The ease with which generative AI can produce fluent English text raises questions about authorship and the validity of writing assessments [Barrot, 2023]. Institutions have responded unevenly, from restricting AI use to integrating it explicitly into instruction, reflecting an unresolved tension in the field.

4. Equity and Access. AI-ALL assumes reliable internet access, suitable devices, and often subscription costs, conditions that are not evenly distributed across EFL contexts [Sumakul et al., 2022]. Where access is unequal, AI risks widening rather than narrowing achievement gaps between learners.

5. Teacher Preparedness. Effective integration of AI depends heavily on teachers' digital literacy and pedagogical training. A qualitative study of pre-service EFL teachers found that participants recognized AI's advantages but also reported feeling underprepared to evaluate AI output critically or to design AI-integrated lessons, pointing to a clear need for structured teacher education in this area [pre-service EFL teacher perceptions study, 2024].

To ground these findings, consider a common scenario in an intermediate EFL writing class. A learner drafts a short argumentative essay and submits it to an AI writing tool for feedback before the next lesson. The tool instantly flags grammatical errors, suggests stronger vocabulary, and offers comments on paragraph organization — feedback the learner would otherwise wait days to receive from an already-overloaded teacher [Barrot, 2023; Guo & Wang, 2024]. The learner revises the draft accordingly and brings both versions to class.

At this point, the teacher's role becomes decisive. Rather than treating the AI feedback as final, the teacher discusses with the learner why certain suggestions improved the text and where the AI's suggestions were generic or missed the intended meaning — a distinction AI tools are not yet reliably able to make on their own [Barrot, 2023]. This combination of AI speed and teacher judgment illustrates the central argument of this article: AI functions best as a mediating resource within a teacher-guided process, not as an independent replacement for it [Dai & Liu, 2024; Guo & Wang, 2024].

Building on the sociocultural mediation perspective [Vygotsky, 1978] and the findings reviewed above, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model in which the EFL learner interacts with both an AI tool and a teacher, who jointly mediate progress toward measurable learning outcomes such as fluency, accuracy, autonomy, and motivation. In this model, the AI tool supplies rapid, wide-ranging input and feedback, while the teacher supplies interpretive oversight, contextual judgment, and socio-affective support that AI cannot yet reliably provide [Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Dai & Liu, 2024].



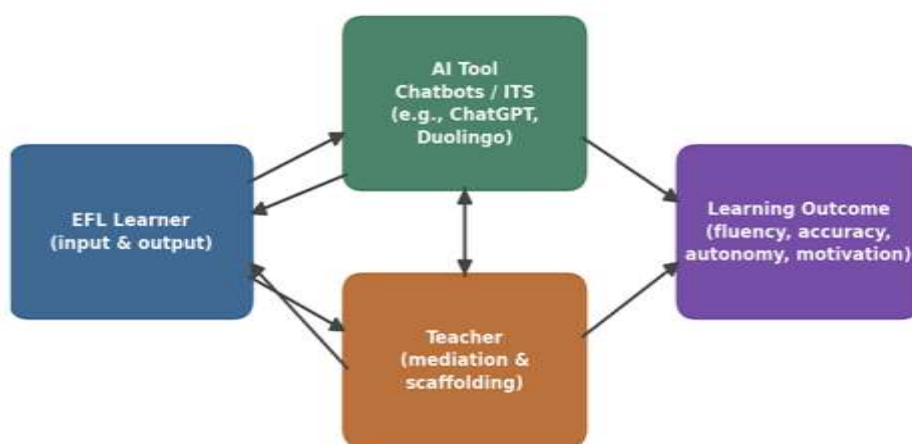


Figure 1. A conceptual model of AI-mediated interaction in the EFL classroom
(adapted from the pedagogical mediation perspective, drawing on Vygotsky, 1978; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Dai & Liu, 2024)

Taken together, the reviewed literature suggests that AI's value in the EFL classroom depends less on the sophistication of the technology itself and more on how deliberately it is integrated into pedagogy. Three recommendations follow from this review. First, institutions should invest in teacher training that builds both digital literacy and critical evaluation skills, so that teachers can guide learners in interpreting AI output rather than accepting it uncritically (Dai & Liu, 2024). Second, AI use should be made explicit and structured within assessment policy, clarifying where AI assistance is permitted and how it should be acknowledged, to protect assessment validity [Barrot, 2023]. Third, institutions should monitor equity of access and provide alternative pathways for learners without reliable technology, so that AI adoption narrows rather than widens learning gaps [Sumakul et al., 2022].

AI-assisted language learning offers EFL classrooms genuine and well-documented opportunities: individualized instruction, immediate feedback, expanded speaking practice, and broader access to authentic materials [Barrot, 2023; Fathi et al., 2024; Jiang, 2022; Song, 2023]. At the same time, the literature is consistent in warning against overreliance, feedback inaccuracy, integrity risks, unequal access, and insufficient teacher preparation [Dai & Liu, 2024; Guo & Wang, 2024; Sumakul et al., 2022]. The evidence reviewed here points toward a balanced conclusion: AI is most beneficial when it operates as a mediating tool within a teacher-guided learning process rather than as a substitute for it. Future research should track how these dynamics evolve as AI systems and classroom practices continue to develop together.



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